Summer of Hopper by boogiewrites

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Summary:

Hopper is in pieces after coming back to Hawkins after Vietnam. How long will you be able to be the strong one if you are also on the edge from taking care of him? If you both break…then what happens?

1. May

He's been gone from Vietnam for close to half a year now but he screams like he's back there most nights. You put your book down and let out a heavy sigh.

"Not again." you whisper as your head turns towards the door to the bedroom. You count on your fingers while you try to remember how many night terrors he's had this month until you run out of fingers. It's been a rough week.

You let your head fall back and you close your eyes. If dealing with it was hard for you, you couldn't even begin to imagine what it was like for him. This mantra had kept you sane so far. It made you drop what you were doing every time and run to him to help however you could. Sometimes you couldn't help and that was the most painful. If he woke up and you weren't there it would be so much worse. Your bare feet make their way across the cold floor, the door creaks but you know he won't hear it. You crawl into bed, making sure to hold your hands up to block his big, lightning-fast hands that liked to lash out in his sleep.

"Jim," you say softly. He whimpers but you don't think it was because of you. You wipe away the tears falling down his face gently with the back of your hand. He stirs but yells out again, you flinch your face because it hurts your heart, not your ears. "Jim," you say louder. His nose twitches. "Wake up big bear." you run your hand along his forehead. Your hopes are shattered again when he screams out orders to a fellow soldier who isn't really there. You gulp and clench your jaw. You place your hands on his chest. "James!" you say loudly, giving him a shove.

He bolts up violently, his arm shoving you back as he sits up, eyes terrified, almost hyperventilating. He looks around, sees you and starts sobbing. You instinctually wrap your arms around him, you straddle his lap, his face hides in your chest. You kiss his head even though his prickly hair makes you want to sneeze as you bury your face in it. His large frame wracked with sobs, moves yours as you let him get it out. He doesn't speak, his arms just wrap around you tightly.

"Shhh. Shhhh. I'm here. You're here with me. You're safe." you say softly. Your hands are rubbing his back and holding his head against your chest. You rock him gently, the sobs start to ease in intensity. He lets out ragged breaths, his forehead against your collarbone. "There you go." you coo. "You've got this, sweetheart," you say as you press the side of your face up against his. You hear a heavy gulp and a gasp for air from him as he lifts his head, you leave your hands on him, just in case. "There he is." you whisper, finally releasing your hold on him and wiping away his tears. Your eyes meet and the pain always drives a dagger right through you. You don't falter, you give him a smile and kiss his forehead.

He clears his throat and his body starts to relax. The worst should be over for now. You move off of him, not saying anything as you lay in bed next to him. He almost immediately turns his big body towards you and lays back down. He curls up against you, you rest your chin on the top of his head as he presses his ear against your chest. His big body lays heavily on yours, your legs tangled together. Eventually, he lets out a heavy sigh and buries his face in your cleavage. Not that he was trying to start anything, you were just soft, warm and comforting. He eventually returns to listening to your heartbeat. You rest your hand on his head, lightly tracing the outline of his ear with your thumb. His arms move under you, squeezing you tightly.
"Love you." he mumbles.

"Love you too." you whisper. You kiss the top of his head again. You drift off to sleep at some point before the sun came up.

The alarm clock goes off. You shake the sleep off slowly as he raises his head, looking around. You reach over to the nightstand and hit the off button. He puts his face back on your sternum and groans.

"I agree." your voice shakey from sleep. You yawn and your chest expanding causes him to let go of you.

"Fuck," he grumbles, rolling over onto his back, staring at the ceiling. You turn to your side and look at him after rubbing your eyes and having a big stretch. This made him turn his head over to look at you. "Sorry about last night." he mumbles, wrapping an arm around your waist, pulling you under him as he rests on one elbow.

You reach up and touch his face, smiling up at him, despite the collective 12 hours of sleep you'd had this week because of him. You have to really love him or be a glutton for punishment. He kisses you softly, looking down at you, his lips twitching in thought. "You need to talk about it?" you ask calmly.

"I don't know if I can do this today." he whispers. You frown because he isn't looking at you directly. You place your hand on the side of his face and rub his cheek with your thumb, he closes his eyes with a sigh, leaning into your touch.

"You can always stay home," you suggest, even though you knew he wouldn't. He shakes his head without opening his eyes. "You wanna shower first and I'll make you breakfast?" you try to make something positive out of this.

He looks at you, eyes tortured and bloodshot. He nods, kissing you again, giving your body a tight squeeze before you both separate.

He's still picking at his food in his uniform when you exit your bedroom, fully dressed. You try to erase the exhaustion and sadness from your face before you head to the kitchen.

"Finished?" you ask as he lays his fork down.

"Yeah, thanks, hun." he says managing a half smile. You put the dishes in the sink and drink down the last of your coffee even though it was cold at this point. You walk behind him seated at your small table in your small kitchen in your small apartment. You wrap your arms around his neck gently, your lips on the top of his head.

"You good with me leaving a little early? I need to get gas and stop by the bank before work." you say as cheerfully as you could muster. He reaches up and puts his hands on yours. He holds and kisses them, his eyes closed. He moves your hands and rises, turning towards you.

"Come here first." he opens his arms and your face softens. It's your turn to hold him as tightly as you can. He takes a few deep breaths with his face buried in your hair. He tried to plant the smell of your perfume into his brain to think about later. "Love you." he says, his voice muffled by your hair. You snuggle your face against him.

"Love you too." you raise your head and stretch on tiptoes for a kiss. A short series of closed mouth kisses was all you had time for this morning. "I'll let you know what my schedule is once I find out this afternoon." you sigh as your fingers drum against his solid back. He nods and kisses you one last time before you have to let him go. Before you shut the door behind you, you poke your head back in at him, he was watching you leave.
"Love you, big bear." you blow him a kiss. He pretends to catch it and puts it in his back pocket.

"I'll need that later." he manages to pull a corner of his mouth up a little for you, "Love you too, honey." he sounds so tired and your gut starts to ache but you don't act on it until you've shut the door. You check your watch and hurry off to get this day over with.

You've been smiling at low tipping customers for hours already. You were pushing yourself past your limits more than you should be. But you felt like you had to.

"Y/N! Phone!" you hear from the back. You politely excuse yourself and scuttle off to the phone on the wall in the back of the diner.

"Y/N speaking." you answer.

"Y/N, it's Flo." her voice doesn't have the usual layer of sass underneath.

"Hey girl, what can I help you with?" you inquire.

"Sweetheart....it's Hopper." she says seriously. Your eyes go wide, your hand goes to your chest. "There's been an incident." The breath leaves your body.

"Is he...is he..." is all you can choke out.

"He isn't dead or dying, dear, but he is in the hospital." you choke back a sob.

"Thank god." you cry out, your hand going to your knees as your body threatens to collapse. Your chest is tight and your head throbs.
"What happened?" you whisper.

"This might seem strange but can you come to the station before you go to the hospital?" she asks, her voice slightly strained.

"What?" now you're even more confused, your chest gets tighter, you feel light headed.

"We'd like to talk to you alone before you see him if that's alright." she says calmly.

"Oh no, what'd he do?" your lungs threaten to start hyperventilating.

"It'll be okay, Y/N, just breathe." she pauses as you gasp a few times, holding both your hands up on the wall, phone still in hand. You give yourself a few moments to collect yourself.

"Okay." you take a painfully deep breath. "Okay. I'm, I'll be fine."

"We don't need you losing it too, just come down, he's not in any real trouble, I promise." your eyes closed and you knew that Flo knew those were the words you'd needed to hear. Your mind could cut out 90% of the scenarios it had already started forming in the chaos of the news.

"I'll...I'll be there as soon as I can. Thanks, Flo."

"Don't thank me, dear, just doing my job. Don't speed, take your time." she scolds.

"Yes ma'am," you say as you hang up the phone. You rest your back against the wall, slouching and resting your hands on your knees again. What was the hell happening? You don't waste any time, you take off your apron, and throw it to the other on shift waitress. "Something's happened to Hopper, I'm leaving." you state as you don't look back and head to the station.

2. Chapter 2

Flo is sitting on a bench in the front of the station waiting for you. She smiles sweetly at you, seeing you're an absolute mess. It wasn't just the smudged mascara and dark circles under your eyes that let her know things weren't going well at home. Your body did not move lightly, your hair did not bounce and your skirt did not swing around you in the way it usually did as you moved. She hopes you at least saw this coming somehow. She holds out her hand as you step onto the curb and she pulls open the door. You take it without hesitation, she'd been nothing but motherly since you'd met her. She leads you to Jim's office.

Your reflexes move to sit in the chairs in front of his desk but you see they're occupied by Callahan and Powell. Callahan's arm is in a sling, you frown and your body jolts slightly as you stop your muscle memory from making you sit in your preferred chair, but that would've made it Powell's lap now. You look over at Jim's chair and sigh. You lower yourself in the sunken chair. You felt like a child in it, you didn't know why Jim seemed to hold himself so powerfully from this seat, it made you feel nothing. Your hands rest on the worn brass knobs at the end of its arms. You look up and see Flo has shut the door and is standing behind the two officers, a hand on each of the backs of their chairs.

"I want to start by saying we're sorry and we know this is hard for you." she states. You nod and half-heartedly smile.

"Thanks" you're even surprised by how tired you sound.

"Callahan went out on a call with him this morning." she starts.

"I was already out on another call." Powell clarifies. You acknowledge Powell and look back to Flo.

"Would you like to tell Y/N what happened?" she nudges Callahan from behind. He's angry, you can tell but he doesn't want to yell at you specifically.

"We got a call about a domestic dispute, it ended up being two old

guys fighting about their property lines and they'd pulled guns on each other. Nothing crazy, these old military guys always stir up trouble from time to time." he thinks nothing of what he's said, you can tell. Your mouth forms a tight line, you're already piecing together what might've happened. "So they're yellin' and carrying on and I say something to the Chief, I don't remember, and he slams me against the car so hard he broke my damn collarbone." he points at the injury. "I start yellin' at him and he starts yelling about someone named Williams," you'd heard him yell out this name in his sleep,"...and starts towards the guys, he was real red and he stumbles and passes out." he shrugs. "I don't know, Y/N, it was real weird. I got no clue what happened, I'll be the first to admit that..."

"Are you really that fucking stupid Callahan?" your answer surprises everyone in the room.

"Wh-Huh? Well I know you're mad but I'm mad too!" he stomps his foot like a child. A weak fist forms on his good arm.

"Oh are you?" you sit up in the chair, a scary laugh emanates from you. Powell looks concerned, Flo just lets it happen, she knew where you were going with this.

"W-Well...YEAH!" he starts to raise his voice and you cut him off.

"GODDAMMIT CALLAHAN!" you shout raising from the chair and slamming your palms on the desk top. "A man, absolutely fucking OOZING with PTSD, who hasn't even been out of Viet-FUCKIN'-nam for a year goes on a call with two MILITARY guys SCREAMING at each other with GUNS and YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED?!" He blinks and stutters.

"Well I didn't think of that." he says, cowering. Flo smacks the back of his head hard for you, you nod at her, she knew what you meant.

"Because you're a goddamn self-absorbed, moronic, piece of fucking work, CAL!" you slam yourself back into the seat, fuming. Your arms and legs are crossed tightly. You stare into Callahan's soul across the big wooden desk. You want to leap across the desk and put his other arm out of commission. Powell clears his throat to cut the tension.

"Ms. Y/N, If I'd known about the call I would've gone. I'm sorry." he bows his head slightly. You let out a heavy sigh.

"You're sweet, Powell, really, none of this is on you." you close your eyes, you uncross your limbs. "He's had over 10 panic attacks and has had night terrors almost 20 times this month." it all rushes out of you and you slump into the chair.

"Damn." Powell responds.

"Yeah, I've gotten under 12 hours of sleep this week, I've gone on less this month." you put your hand on your forehead, rubbing your temple.

"Sweet heart, it's Friday, how on earth are you dealing with this?" she says concerned.

"I'm not." tears well up in your eyes. "We're not. He screams all night and all I can do is be there for him." you start to choke.

"It's okay, we get it." she nudges Callahan again roughly.

"Sorry, Y/N I didn't know." he says softly.

"I know." you sigh and take a deep breath, shaking your head quickly and cutting the cue on the tears.

"Well what we, I, wanted to suggest might be a relief for you then." she sighs and shifts her weight on her feet. "I mean this with the most respect and love I have, Y/N, but you need to get him the hell out of here." she calmly states.

"Is he fired?" you asked, shocked.

"No! Oh no, dear," she huffs out a quick, reassuring laugh. "Nothing like that. He just needs a break. You clearly do too." she says, her face sad. "I suggest getting out of Hawkins for a few months."

"Months?" you say, your eyes wide.

"Yes. I think taking the summer off for both of you would do you a world of good. Take him out to mountains, get away from everything

for awhile. You know?" she gives you time to digest her words.

"That..." you shrug, "That isn't the worst idea." you look away to a picture of Jim, smiling in a group of friends. You swallow hard, realizing you can't remember the last time you saw him smile like that.

"I'm very relieved to hear you say that. Especially after what you just told us, IN CONFIDENCE." she shouts just inches from Callahan's ears. You shift your eyes over to him.

"Yeah, geez, I got it. I'm sorry." he flinches and looks at the ground.

"I don't know how he'll react but...what the hell else am I gonna do?" you shrug, letting out a slightly demented laugh. You stand, stopping in the doorway and turning back. "I don't forgive you yet but...I regret screaming at you, Cal." he nods, still afraid to do anything like a threatened animal. Flo reaches out for your hand, you give her yours with a very tired smile. She squeezes it and gives you a hopeful glance.

"I'm here if you need me." she offers, you nod graciously. Your heavy feet make their way to the glass double doors of the station, the bright daylight makes everything blow out of focus for a few seconds.

As he hears the door shut, Callahan speaks.
"It was like she was possessed by the Chief for a minute there, wasn't it?"

"Yeah." Powell nods, looking out the door at you leaving. "She wasn't even yelling at me and I was scared." he huffs out a small laugh.

"Do think it's the chair?" Callahan says, staring at the chair intensely. Powell shakes his head.

"You're hopeless, Cal." he says, tsking and leaving the room.

"WHAT'D I DO?" Callahan yells after him, Flo whacks him in the back of the head again, for you.

You jogged to the reception desk of the hospital. From one disaster to the next you went today it seemed. No sooner than your palms land

on the top of her desk, a classmate of yours from high school says,

"Room 199. The last door on the left." she gives you an apologetic smile. You bet she had to hand those out all day.

"Bless you." you thank her in rushed words as you continue bounding to his room.

You peak your head in just to make sure it's the right one and you see him. You don't even know if you were this happy to see him when he walked back in the diner the week after he came back home. You remind yourself you're the strong one again and attempt to hold back your tears.

The split second before he realized you're there, you see him in his unfiltered state. You both looked really similar actually. You had more life behind your eyes though, his were defeated. When he sees you come in, they don't change that much, he doesn't clear his throat and put up a front like he thinks he can fool you into thinking he's okay. You don't say anything, you put your knee on the bed, raising yourself up to lay your body over his. He's surprised but he welcomes it. You plant your face in the curve of his neck, squeezing your arms around him tightly. He nuzzles you back, his big arms encircling you. You let the tears go. You're forced to. They fall silently until he speaks.
"You okay?" he whispers, his cheek resting against yours. You let out a choked sob and he grabs your shoulders, forcing you to move so he can see your face. You try to wipe away your tears but as soon as you start taking in his face, not the face of the boy you'd fallen stupidly in love with all those years ago, but a shell of the man he was, who he could be, should be. Your body just slumped and you sobbed. "It's okay, Y/N. Honey, I'm pretty much cleared, they just haven't brought me my papers yet." he tries to reassure you but you shake your head back and forth against his chest.

"No. It's not okay, Hop." you manage to get out, you put your weight on one arm by his side, practically laying on top of him. You try to smooth out the depressing white and blue fabric that covers his chest. Your mascara smudged across it. You wipe your eyes and take a deep breath. Once you feel strong enough to meet his gaze, you do. He would've cried if he could've managed it. He let you put yourself back

together, just like you'd done for him, countless times. One hand ran up and down your arm that held your weight up. The other on your thigh, just waiting for a call to be useful to you. "I love you more than anything Jim but we're not okay." you sniffle. He doesn't know what to say so he finally verbally admits defeat.

"I know." he rasps out, he can't look at you. He wants to disappear, his head throbs, his mouth is dry.

"I love you so much." you choke out, resting your head on his chest.

"I love you too." he says softly, his hands grip you tightly.

"We're gonna get out of here." you whisper, you know he can hear you, your body wants to exert as little energy as it can.

"Yeah they're bringing my-" you cut him off and rest your chin on him, looking up at him.

"No. I mean out of Hawkins." he looks down at you confused.

"What are you talking about?" he's wondering if he heard you right.

"For the summer." you clear your throat. "We're gonna pack up and we're going to get out of here. Go to the mountains. Just me and you." you rest your cheek back against him again. His eyes just wander the room, he understands what you're saying but he still has a lot of questions and he's not in any state to try to make sense of things. "Wasn't there a cabin you talked about? Someplace you liked as a kid?" your voice tried to sound soothing and hopeful.

His brow furrows, trying to dig for the information you're pulling from the back of his brain. "Well, yeah, but some people came and bought it, I don't know if it's even there anymore." his head shakes, nose scrunched in thought.

"We'll find it. We'll go there," you state definitively. He appreciates your enthusiasm but is still skeptical of your ability to follow through on this whirlwind adventure you'd concocted in your head.

He decides to start by saying, "How?" he looks back down at you, he rubs your back and you let out a small noise of content at the touch.

He's compelled to smile but the heart is strong and his body isn't willing.

"I'll get the money I've got in savings, I'll find the place and we'll figure out the rest. I'll quit my job. You need to escape and so do I." you plead to him with your eyes. "You're not getting better here, I'm going to take us somewhere you can." your voice sounds more pointed and desperate the more you elaborate.

"I don't want to go to any-" he starts.

"Just a cabin." you cut him off again. You didn't usually make a habit of it in your day to day conversations. "Just us." you look back up at him. "Can you imagine it Hop?" you whisper, leaning into his face. "In the woods. Away from everything. No schedule. No clocks. Nobody else." you sigh. You see him weighing the options, his brow furrowed in thought.

"How?" he asks again. "Even if you found this place," his voice show shows his obvious doubt and hesitation. "We don't have the money to." he tucks some wandering strands of hair behind your ear, his face in a subtle frown.

"Yes, I do." you say, looking away. His looks asks you wordlessly. You sigh and sit back up. "Before you came back," you pause and bite your lip because you hadn't wanted to tell him this. "I'd been saving up money to leave Hawkins." your eyes eventually swoop back up to his, your fingers are picking at the scratchy blanket that's over him.

"You were?" his head tilts, his face goes through a few different emotions. "Why?"

You let out a huff of laughter. "Because without you it felt like there wasn't anything keeping me here anymore." you sound angrier than you meant to. "I hate my fucking job, I have no family here and a tiny shitty apartment. No friends I'd miss and no one worth dating left." you state passionately. It felt so strange to hear the words out loud you'd screamed at yourself in your head endlessly to convince yourself to leave in the first place. You might've been fooling yourself but you felt sort've...lighter now.

He's more than a little surprised. He'd never heard you talk about this, especially in such an emotional way. You'd never even let on that you had been planning to move. You just took him in without asking anything in return and loved him when he couldn't love himself. You'd saved him and if he'd not come home when he had...well he didn't need to think about the repercussions of that right now.

"I'm loading all this bullshit on you, I'm sorry." you take his hand and kiss it. "I'm sorry I'm probably being selfish." you shake your head, starting to look away from him but you hear a laugh, albeit a small one but a laugh none the less come from him. You can't look away because you don't remember the last time you heard the sound and don't know if you might hear it again. You smile dreamily at him.

"Selfish is something that no one could ever accuse you of being." he pulls you in and kisses you. "If you were selfish you would've left me ages ago and I'd be dead by now." Your eyes widen at his words.

"Hop." you whisper just inches from his face, you move to put your hand on the side of his face, he covers your hand with his, making you look and feel so small.

"Well, it's true." he says, with passion behind his voice. You tried to remember if you'd ever heard his tone like that, a tiny flicker of hope erupted in your stomach. "I'm," he sighs, frustrated, "I'm not trying to be dramatic, it's just true and I might as well say it out loud." his shoulders relax as you let him speak.

"That can help." you squeak out. He looks over your face, nothing but love in your eyes.

"I don't know what I did to deserve you." He pulls you in for a kiss that you feel deep in your stomach. Your eyes squeeze shut and you wrap your arms around his neck. His arms around you held tight. You don't plan it but you both go for deepening the kiss. You haven't kissed like this in months. Right now you lived in this moment with him inside this kiss. You hadn't sensed this feeling from him in what felt like eons. Like a lifetime ago since you'd been through so much in such a relatively short amount of time.

You eventually part, your foreheads pressed together, eyes closed, both of each other's hands clutched tightly in the other against his chest. You were going to tell him how much you loved him but you're interrupted.

"Ahem." a doctor knocks on the doorframe, grinning at the two of you. You pull away, only the tiniest bit embarrassed. At least she hadn't walked in on you kissing. "I see she got here quickly." she chuckles. "Do I have permission to discuss your treatment with her here?" she asks him as she flips the chart in her hands open.

"Oh, yeah, she's the one that takes care of me." he smiles at you and you at him.

"Just a formality. If it's not too improper, you two are adorable." she laughs as her finger skims the paperwork in front of her.

Now you were slightly embarrassed.

"You must be Y/N." she says, reaching her hand out. "I"m Dr. Brighton. He was placed under my care when he was brought in." she politely introduces herself.

"That's me." you say, unsure as to how she knows your name.

"He wouldn't stop talking, well, more like mumbling for you while he came to. Then he kept asking everyone on the staff if someone had called you to let you know he was here." You can't help but let out a huff of laughter and he squeezes your hand. You grin at him.

"Sounds like him." you look away from him and back to her.

"The tests show no brain damage, no broken bones." her eyes dart around the crowded forms. "He was treated for exhaustion and dehydration." she pauses, reading before she speaks again. "But I'm assuming you're aware of his PTSD." her voice remains polite and calm. You nod, he squeezes your hand again, you squeeze back. "He seems to have experienced some form of anxiety or panic attack. From what he's told me, he's dealing with night terrors and flashbacks which isn't out of normal realms for what he's been through. I'm not a psychiatrist but I very seriously recommend he

seek out some form of mental health help." she gives him a polite and respect filled nod. "Besides that, physically he's good, everything within normal limits." she shrugs and smiles again, folding the chart shut. "Any questions?"

You shake your head, she told you nothing you didn't know already. You glance over at him, he looks at you first, shaking his head then to her.

"If you're good then I'll get your discharge papers moving and you two can get back home. You both look like you could use some rest." she smiles again, "Maybe take some time off Hopper? Destress, use up those vacation days?" she suggests. You look over at him, if you'd had the energy left you would've smirked.

"Yeah I think that's the plan." he answers, you squeeze his hand. She nods and exits.

3. June

Not just between the two of you but, you as your own person felt different. You'd bolted the doors, shut off the lights, pulled the curtains and taken the phone off the hook after you brought him home. You'd both slept 16 hours straight. A personal record for you both. You would've stayed in that bed with him another 16 hours if you'd had that option.

Within a week you're on the road to a secluded cabin in the woods. You'd taken out most of your savings and crossed off everything on your list of things to take care of before you left. You shoved everything into the back of your jeep. And by everything, you mean your whole life basically. Wanting to be over prepared for whatever a summer-long trip to a secluded lake house in the deep woods could bring, you'd meticulously planned a list to accommodate as many foreseen circumstances as you could.

Jim would say, "You're sure a girl scout." every time you'd mention adding something to the list. You were trying to pull the Jeep equivalent of sitting on top of a suitcase to shut the hatch as Jim strolls up behind you and with his hands alone on the back hatch.

"Show off." you mutter playfully.

The mood was lighter now. Not perfect but you felt rested and relieved to get away.

You put away the map finally, you're on the outskirts of the National Forrest, you take your aggression out on the map by foregoing folding it and shoving it forcefully into the glove box.
"This road straight to the cabin." you state, laying your head back against your seat. The drive was too long for your liking and it made you feel impatient.
By some twist of fate, the place Jim had remembered was still there. By some miracle, it'd been renovated by the new owners and used to rent out. Due to its secluded location, you had by, yet some divine intervention, been able to secure the rental of this place for the summer. After that, the rest of the planning hadn't been such a miracle, but you forget about that once the place started coming into

view.

You see the lake, sun shining on its surface as you make your way down the curved driveway to the cabin. It was breathtaking. The green trees covered the hills that rested on either side of the lake.

The cabin is at the end of the driveway now. Jim's face is neutral, he wasn't the least bit stirred by the drive or the trip. He'd even talked himself into looking forward to all of it. Not like spending the summer in a cabin in the woods with a beautiful woman who loved you to a fault would ever sound like a bad plan.

He takes in the sight before him, a lake in a little valley, behind a log cabin. The dock bobbing in the water, splashing against the waves. It was the only sound you could really hear as you both step out of the car in silence.

You both turn to look at each other, your hands reach out over the hot hood of the Jeep, coming together to stand side by side in front of it. Your expressions of various forms of relief mirror each other, both taking in the scene before you. Your home for the summer.

You squeeze his hand, holding up the keys to the cabin, shaking them and nodding towards the cabin.

You're walking up to door, keys in hand as you crack open the heavy wood door. A humid heat hits you and your face screws up in a very unpleasant way. You immediately go in search of an air conditioner, the owner said it fully air-conditioned, something that you knew you couldn't live without over the summer. You try to turn the light switch on, it doesn't work. You'll need to switch the power on, you recall. You decide to open up all the windows first, you could get a good look at everything that way. The place was cozy. The light shines through the windows as you open each one, pinning their matching curtains back. The place wasn't pre-historic and for that you were thankful. It was at least 2 times the size of your apartment it felt, with a bigger TV to boot. The full kitchen was decorated with various farm animals, most of which were dressed as a chef in some way or another. It was corny but you didn't hate it. You see a deck out the kitchen window and move to find the key to the back door. You use your shoulder to shove it open, propped it with the

hedgehog door stop you saw waiting to be helpful. You stand in the doorway to an open to a deck and backyard you just knew Jim would love. There was a grill in a corner, a hot tub underneath an adorable pergola with torches surrounding it. You nod in approval as you peek under the lid and find no dead animals and no gross smells. You're glad the place was so far, worth the money. You walk down the steps to the lush fenced in back yard. A cute, unassuming shed off to one side, a hammock between two ancient trees.

You walk to the line of the fence separating you and the small beach that leads to the dock of the lake. You drag it open and your feet start to crunch the rock and sand beneath them. You happily swayed in the wind, sighing with the crashing of the waves. You couldn't help but feel hopeful that this was what Jim needed. You decide you need to deal with the house before dipping your feet into the water.

You shut the gate and head back in, seeing a small bathroom window you'd left shut on the first floor. A half bath sits in the corner of the open floor plan downstairs, underneath the floor of what you're assuming is the master bed and bath. You start to climb the stairs and realize you've still not seen Jim.

You walk back out onto the porch, covered in a thin layer of sticky sweat. You start to head down the front steps but you stop as you see him. You lean against the big wooden post that forms the banister. He's found a porch swing, but it sat under a huge tree, hanging from one of its massive limbs. His eyes are closed, hands clasped in his lap together. His jaw was unclenched for the first time in a long while. Your heart is in your throat as you watch his feet lazily moving back and forth, swinging himself slightly. He takes a deep breath and slouches against the back of the swing. You take a mental picture of this moment and swallow hard, composing yourself. You decide to join him.

His eyes delicately flutter open as you get within a few feet of him. You sit next to him in silence, taking in the view. He lays his arm over the back of the swing, his thumb lazily rubs your arm. You let out a content sigh. You decide to close your eyes too. You feel the wind against your bare skin, the rustling of the leaves that follows. A woodpecker in the distance does what his name suggests. The birds sound like they're talking to each other, their various songs swirl

around you.

“You couldn’t have made a better choice.” he whispers, his mouth against your ear. You get a chill from his lips ghosting over your ear and the wind chilling the sweat that covered your skin. You open your eyes, there’s nothing but trees as far as you can see in any direction opposite the lake.

“You like it?” you ask, resting your head against him.

“I love it.” he says softly, pressing his lips against the top of your head. You were hoping there would be entire afternoons spent just existing together like you were now. You look up at him, his eyes looked clear and bright, a lot like the color of the lake. You had the place for 3 months. You’d decided to just go for it and seclude yourselves for as long as you could. It was already paying off.
“You interested in seeing the inside?” you suggest, “Staying right here is also a choice.” you smile, feeling even your most tense muscles start thinking about relaxing.

“Yeah, let’s try to get settled in before it gets dark.” he kisses your forehead. He moves his hand back, wiping away the sweat from your skin.

"Yeah, it’s a sauna in there. I opened all the windows but could you get the power on for me?“ you bat your eyelashes.

"Anything you want.” he whispers, electing to kiss your lips this time. You hum against him as you reluctantly lift yourself out of the picturesque moment and start back into the cabin.You feel a little dizzy from the most romantic contact you’d felt from him in awhile. You’d been running on fumes for so long, functioning for survival only. Being able to even feel that tingle he gave you trickling up and down your spine from his words and lips felt almost overwhelming.

At the top of the stairs, you creak open the bedroom door. The light from the bay doors floods the room. The wood was painted a muted

grey, white sheets, white curtains. Even before the breeze entered the room from the windows you opened it was clean and crisp and made you want to melt into the bed and never leave. You push on the bed with your hand hard, testing it. You then smirk, walking back to the door way, you tie your hair back and then you take a short running leap, face first onto the California king-sized cloud you'd be sleeping on.

The sheets shoot out a poof of air as you land face first into the bed. It reminded you of playing in the snow as a kid, all the white surrounding you in rolling hills. The whirring of electricity brings you back into the moment. You look up to see the ceiling fan above you starting to slowly spin. The power was on. The air vents bow and make metallic booms fire off throughout the cabin as they boot up. You hear the steps creak over the buzz off the power.

You hear a small chuckle from Jim behind you, you enthusiastically move your head so you can speak.

"Stop laughing and try it." you say in a taunting voice, raising yourself up and rolling to the foot of the bed. He shrugs and walks over, falling onto his back on the bed, the sheets give his large form a much louder poof than they did for you. He smiles and turns his head towards you.

"This is the biggest bed I've ever seen." he remarks.

"Big enough for both of us." you roll next to him, laying on your stomach, propped up on your elbows, looking out the double doors to the balcony.

"Man this thing is nice." he sighs out, closing his eyes. You sneak in a quick kiss to his lips before heading off to open the patio doors. The wind rushes into the room. You stand in the way of it, your loose hair whipping around. You slowly walk out and place your hands on the railing. The view was amazing. Jim comes up behind you, wrapping his arms around your waist. "This place is perfect, honey." he rests his chin on your shoulder. "Thank you." he kisses your ear, his face falling into the bend of your neck. You raise your hand to mingle

your fingers in his hair as he gives you a small kiss on your neck. You feel that tingle again. He can feels your pulse speed up under his lips, he hums contently, squeezing you tighter. Your eyes close as the feeling overtakes more than just your spine. Your breathing picks up and he smirks against your skin as he feels you shiver in his arms. “I know you’re not shivering because it’s cold.” he teases, a low laugh fades after he kisses your ear and pulls away from you slightly and you turn in his arms.

“Well, duh.” you were too flustered to think of a good response.”Those shivers are always your fault.” you say, laughing and pulling out of his arms. You turn and see an entire end of the balcony filled with what you’re assuming was supposed to be a bench. You pat his chest and move to inspect it. He grabs your wrist and pulls you back to him. His arm wraps up your back, his eyes are moving across your face and you see that spark behind his eyes. Before you can feel heartfelt about it, he smoothly closes the space between you, pushing his lips against yours. Your knees very literally go weak as everything else fades away around you. You feel dizzy again, your hands go to his body to steady yourself. You wait to open your eyes after he kisses you, trying to pull yourself together. You always thought the first kiss after he’d come back couldn’t be topped but that one was a top contender.

“Sorry. I know we’ve got stuff to do but I couldn’t help myself.” he sighs out, his hands running through your hair as he pulls his hands away from you and puts them in his pockets.

“If you ever apologize after kissing me like that again I will leave you.” you both laugh at your dazed tone. “I will come back but I will leave for like, 5 minutes.” you start to giggle as he hugs you and then turns you back towards where you were headed in the first place.

You move not incredibly smoothly over to the corner of the balcony. You lift the lid on this big wooden platform and quickly realize it’s another bed. Well, kind’ve. There are billowing cushions and pillows protected under the hard, wood cover. There are strings of lights spanning around the nest and across the outside of the walls of the balcony.

“This place might be perfect.” you whisper to yourself. You have one

last room to inspect. You give him a sweet smile as you pass him to slide the door to the master bath open and you almost start laughing like a woman possessed. “Alright! This place is heaven!” you shout towards Jim, still by the railing of the balcony. The bathroom mirrors the bedroom in it’s white and grey decor. A long counter top with a huge sink in the middle sits in front of a giant mirror on the wall. There’s a bathtub that takes up an entire corner of the room and across from the vanity sits a built-in shower with a shower head dropping out of the ceiling. “This is ridiculous,” you say under your breath.

“You can say that again.” Jim walks in, whistling at the setup. “I think there used to be more bedrooms up here.” he mumbles, looking around.

“There’s a bench!” you shout from inside the cavernous shower. Your voice echoing off the stone walls. He can see your silhouette through the foggy coated squares of glass that served as the door for the shower. It was like a little walk in ice cave and you wanted to be buried in it. “You can leave me here, I’ve found my spot.” you laugh, looking at the different knobs.

“I don’t know if I’ve ever wanted to live in a shower before.” his eyes roam around the expanse of the shower that was almost as big as your entire bathroom back home.

“It’s even tall enough to where you don’t have to hunch over!” you enthusiastically say, reaching your hands up towards the shower head. He walks over to you and stands under it.

“Well I’ll be damned.” he says looking up at it. He’s not felt normal sized in a shower since before he hit puberty. “Got room for one more to live in here with you?” he huffs, shaking his head.

“I think so yeah.” you nod and beam up at him. You exit the shower and didn’t even notice how the toilet had its own little cubby, tucked behind a half wall. You’re going to sprain your neck from shaking your head so much. You had gone from questioning how much money you’d spent to thinking you got this place for cheap. Your stomach rumbles, taking you out of your fantasy of buying the cabin.

“Let’s get this stuff in so I can cook.” you hit your hands together to show you’re ready to work.
On the way down the stairs Jim suggests, “You bring in the kitchen boxes and get food going, we’re gonna be starving after all this.” he heads to the porch, your trailing behind him happily. “I’ll bring in everything else."

"Deal.” you hold out your hand to him for a shake, making a goofy grin at him. He lets out a small laugh, he pulls your hand from your spot on the top of the stairs, he catches your waist and sits you on the ground, finally returning your handshake. He turns from you and to the car with a lazy grin. You swooned at him as he moved away, you felt like you were getting him back.

You have the water working, inventory was taken on what you and the cabin had all together, and everything that could spoil was put away in a rapidly growing colder fridge. You turn the oven on and throw in the pre-prepared chicken and potatoes to warm them back up. You grab a can of peas and slide it down the counter to heat up later.

You wipe your hands, watching Jim stomp in and shut the door behind him. He’s sweaty and out of breath, making his way over to you, you offer him the hand towel, he takes it and rubs it all over his head and neck.

“Everything from the car is in.” he huffs out, sitting at the counter stool, his elbow resting on the top.

“Just waiting for the food to heat up and we’re good. You gonna eat before you shower or after? you ask, leaning your elbows on the opposite side of the counter as he was. "You get dibs on christening it.” you chuckle, playfully shoving his forearm with your fingers. “I’m

jealous.” you grin at him.

“Yeah I’ll take you up on that.” he nods, his upper lip raised as if he’s still thinking about taking the opportunity.

“Make sure you tell me everything about it when you get back.” you laugh as he starts to walk away. You reach your hand over his sweaty forearm, pulling him towards you, he is easily swayed your way.

“I’m all sweaty.” he warns as your arms start to wrap around him.

“I know that’s part of it, handsome.” you say holding him against you. He actually laughs, a true honest laugh and you hum in content at the sound.

“You’re gonna be a happy woman if you like me sweaty with this summer heat.” his amusement is still obvious in his voice.

“Oh, I’ve already been thinking about it.” you swoon, your fingers lingering on his sides.

“You’re gross. Very cute! But also gross.” he shakes his head, holding your face. He keeps kissing you as you laugh into his mouth.

“Go shower big bear, dinner will be done when you are.” you return his kiss and pull out of his reach, heading back to grab a pot to heat the peas.

"If you insist, honey.“ he grabs a box marked bathroom and smoothly turns around and his long legs carry him up the stairs quickly.

It isn’t too long before you hear him triumphantly yell from the shower, you can’t help but laugh at the sound. You knew that this upwards mood swing was just temporary but that didn’t mean you weren’t going to try to allow yourself to enjoy every second of it you could.

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You had finished eating. Jim had stayed downstairs to try to figure out the entertainment system set up as you took your turn in the shower. It really was a near magical experience, you knew you were going to have to find reasons to take more showers.

You dig through the boxes by the label, piecing together something to sleep in and to wear in the morning. You’d put your boxes in the bathroom and Jim’s in the bedroom for now, there wasn’t a ton of room in the bedroom so you didn’t want to crowd the space. Your hair is partially dry by the time Jim makes his way upstairs. You’re rubbing lotion on your legs as he takes off his shorts and crawls into bed, pulling the comforter up over him. He sits against the headboard watching you.

"Bedtime then I guess?” you laugh, turning your head towards him at the head of the bed.

“I drove and moved those boxes, I’m beat.” he says, yawning. You walk around the room, closing the door, leaving one window cracked, making sure Jim locked everything before you turn the overhead light out. The low light of the bedside lamp let you see your way to crawl in the bed. You turn to shut it off after getting under the covers. His arm is already around your waist, pulling you from the edge of the huge bed towards him, you squirm trying to wiggle yourself across the expanse of the bed.

“You’re so far away.” you laugh, rolling over and into his arms.

“Huge bed.” he mumbles into your shoulder. You smile and adjust your pillow. He settles directly behind you, his face pressed against the base of your neck. You lazily rub his forearm that weighs heavily on you. He groans at the light scratches you trail across his skin.

“Night Jim.” you whisper, bringing his hand up to kiss it. He moves to let your shoulder fall back so he can lean down and kiss you properly. He pulls back after he hears your content sigh.

“Night, honey.” his voice low and tired. “Love you.” he plants one kiss on the nape of your neck, he feels you shiver and smiles to himself, burying his face in your hair.

“Love you, big bear.” you sigh out, letting a yawn escape before falling asleep easily for the first time this year.